

ORIGINAL LETTERS
OF
WILLIAM PENN.

(487)

ORIGINAL LETTERS, ETC.

THE following three letters have been selected from several which are manifestly in the handwriting of William Penn, and were probably the rough draughts made by him, and subsequently copied. They were found among the papers of the late estimable Doctor John Syng Dorsey, who, it is supposed, derived them from his grandfather, Edmund Physick, formerly an officer under the Proprietary government. Mrs. Dorsey has kindly given permission to make the publication.

It may not be improper to observe that the Earl of Rochester, to whom one of the letters is addressed, was not the witty and profligate nobleman who once possessed that title. That unhappy young man, worn out by his vices, expired in 1680.

1. TO THE LORD KEEPER NORTH.

MY NOBLE FRIEND,

It hath been sometimes a question with me whether writing or silence would be more excusable, for it is an unhappiness incident of great men to be troubled with the prospects of those their power and goodness oblige; but because I had rather want excuse for this freedom than be wanting of gratitude to my benefactor, I deter-

mined to render my most humble thanks for the many favors I received at the Lord North's hand, in the passing and great dispatch of my patent. I thank God I am safely arrived, and twenty-two sail more; the air proveth sweet and good, the land fertile, and springs many and pleasant. We are one hundred and thirty miles from the main sea, and forty miles up the freshes. The town platt is a mile long and two miles deep; on each side of the town runs a navigable river, the least as broad as the Thames at Woolwych, the other above a mile; about eighty houses are built, and I suppose above three hundred farms settled as contiguously as may be. We have had since last summer about sixty sail of great and small shipping, which we esteem a good beginning: a fair we have had, and weekly markett, to which the ancient lowly inhabitants come to sell their produce to their profit and our accommodation. I have also bought lands of the natives, treated them largely, and settled a firm and advantageous correspondency with them; who are a careless, merry people, yet in property strict with us, though as kind as among themselves; in counsel so deliberate, in speech short, grave, and eloquent, young and old in their several class, that I have never seen in Europe anything more wise, cautious, and dexterous; 'tis as admirable to me as it may look incredible on that side of the water. The weather often changeth with notice and is constant almost in its inconstancy. Our trees are saxafrax, cyprus, cedar, black walnut, chestnut, oak black, white, red, Spanish and swamp the most durable; divers wild fruits, as plum, peach, and grape, the sorts divers.

Mineral of copper and iron in divers places. I have only to add, that it would please the Lord North to smile favorably upon us, a plantation so well regulated for the benefit of the crown, and so improving and hopeful by the industry of the people, that since stewards used to follow such enterprises in ancient times at least encouragement and countenance might be yielded us, whose aims shall in everything be bounded with a just regard to the king's service; and we think we may reasonably hope, that, England being the market both of our wants and industry in great measure, there is interest as well as goodness of our side. I have pardon to ask for a poor present I make by the hands of the bearer, my agent and kinsman, Capt. Markham; all I have to say is this, 'tis our country produce, and that of old time offerings were valued by the heart that made them. I end with a congratulation of the honor the king hath joyn'd to thy great merit, and my sincere and most affectionate wishes for thy prosperity; being one of those many whom thy goodness hath obliged to own and approve, as really I am,

Thy very sensible, thankfull friend,
and servant to my power,

WM. PENN.

Philadelphia, the 24th, 5th mo., July, 1683.

TO THE LORD KEEPER NORTH.

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2. TO THE EARL OF ROCHESTER.

Philadelphia, 2d, 12 mo., Feby., 1683.

MY NOBLE FRIEND,

It cannot be strange to a Lord of so much experience, that in nature all creatures seek succor against might; the young from their old and the feeble from the strong, and that the same nature, by reciprocal instinct, inspires the old to protect their young, and the strong the weak of their own kind. This, my noble Lord, is much of my case and this trouble; and to whom can I goe with more reason and hope than to him that hath, with so much honor and truth and a perpetual success, been the kind and constant patron of my just cause! Lett this therefore, noble Lord, meet with thy usual favor; which will add to the many bonds I am under, as affection and gratitude to thy just interest and service.

My last to the Duke brought with it a copy of a demand made by the Proprietor of Maryland, with my answear to it, another of which I have presumed to inclose, and pray that somebody may be commanded to read it at thy riseing or undressing, as being too long for a time of business, and yet the matter would not admit of more contraction. I dare humbly hope that the king's right, that of his royall highness, and what their grace and favor have made mine, against the pretentions of that Lord, will appear in my answear with a more than ordinary force and evidence. To which I pray leave briefly to add, first, that the land in question was never de-

manded by him of those in possession, till by silence and omission forfeited; the lower parts of this river and bay having never been askt for of the Dutch for six and twenty years, much less reduced; if a title [?] by neglect in an improv'd country, here more, where the wildness of the soyle rendereth it not above the sixtieth part to that which is labor'd and improved. The upper part of this river, from Christina River to the falls, was never demanded of the Swedes nor Dutch neither, since they reduced it; which is now about thirty years from when the crown of England took it in the 1664 as I take it; and has been since held *jure belli ac pacis*. This is not all; he never run his line, these fifty years that he hath had his graunt — a default never to be plac'd to the accompt of the possessor, nor yet to the crown, for granting it to another; non-improvement and neglect of fixing bounds makeing the loss just on his side, were his pretensions otherwise right; for as there is no transgression where no law is, so where there are no bounds sett, nor possessor found, nor any claimant appears, there cannot (with submission) be any title against the planter. Nay, it is the practice of all these parts of America, and was the express condition in all the Duke's patents to the free men planters of his colony, they settling and improving the premises. In the next place, what he seeks never was, as well as it is not, in his possession, consequently never cost him anything to improve, nor has he lost any income by its being mine. To this I add that he doth not want it; he hath two hundred miles (for two degrees) upon both sides of the bravest bay in the world, Chesea-

peack, while I have but one side of an inferior one, and none at all, it seems, if he could have his will, to the ruin of (perhaps) the most prosperous beginnings in America. I have but two creeks that ships of two hundred tun can enter out of the river for harborage; he has fourty (and to spare) that ships of five hundred tun can enter and ride in. And tho' this argument ought not to prevaile against absolute right, yet, in a case circumstanced as this of mine is, I hope that prudence and proportion, together with my arguments of contrary right, will more then even the scale. With God I leave it, and my noble friends; but, if I am herein disappointed, it will be a ruinous voyage to me, having spent, in my preperations, transport, and maintenance of the quality of Governor, aye, and the government too, with the appendant charges, a vast sum more then ever I received; and I hope and believe the King and Duke, by favor of my noble friend, will never suffer me to fall short of the most important part of the grant and country, and which that Lord hath no right to, want of, nor loss by. And now, my noble friend, give me leave to vallue myselfe to the Duke by so acceptable a proxy as the Lord of Rochester in his affairs of New York; he must indeed remember the humble advice I gave him, when in his closett he askt me my opinion of his selling of New York, what I writt to him from hence in that affair, and the zeal and respect I have shown in his service herein, and that not without success (tho' any one will think I did not play the cuning man in it); and I cannot suffer myself to believe that a prince of his generous and steady temper will permit so

fatal a stroake to come upon my honest interest, nay, his own (and that of no small moment to New York, for it is the garrison's grainery), as to let that Lord go away with the only river and bay I have any interest in, who, besides that he has no right to them, needs them not, never had them and so looses nothing by the want of them, I humbly conceive is neither more able nor willing to serve the Duke there or here. I have done; only please to remember what I told the king at Windsor, who graciously permitted me to render him my thanks and take my leave of him, to witt, that if ever any unhappy occasion came to try the truth of the assurance I gave the king of the quaker's unfactious and peaceable principles towards him and his government, my life and estate on't they would not derogate from my character; that if I could lye to any I would not choose to do it to him, whose goodness had not only obliged me, but also putt me more within his power to be even with me. This, it seems, is but too soon confirmed by the madness and folly of some evil and restless men. God defend these kingdoms from blood and misery, and send us peace in our dayes; which I humbly wish my noble friend to think upon in behalf of my peaceable friends, lest men, even disinterested, that look on, should say with too much truth that in England, in times of dainger, there is no odds in being innocent. I shall add no more but my best wishes, and that I am with much zeal and affection, my noble friend, thy most oblieged and faithful friend,

WM. PENN.

If I may pray, please to give my most humble duty to the King and Duke.

FOR THE EARLE OF ROCHESTER.

3. TO THE MARQUIS OF HALLIFAX.

MY NOBLE FRIEND,

It is an unhappiness small folks are exposed to, that the discharge of their duty is an increase of their debt. I am one of those who am obliged to this acknowledgement, and yet the freedom of making it, needs an apology: but I take comfort in this, that I have to do with a very merciful creditor, one that is as easy to forgive as ready to oblige; which is all the defence I shall make for myself in the liberty I take. I hope my agent hath presented thee with my last and the respects I bear so honourable a friend. I did in that give some account of our condition here, which (thanks be to God) mends upon us. Our capital town is advanced to about 150 very tolerable houses for wooden ones; they are chiefly on both the navigable rivers that bound the ends or sides of the town. The farmers have got their winter corn in the ground. I suppose we may be 500 farmers strong. I settle them in villages, dividing five thousand acres among ten, fifteen, or twenty families, as their ability is to plant it. Germans, Dutch, and French are concern'd in our prosperity with their own; for here are come three parties (one of each) as spies to the multitude, they say, behinde, that on their report will also embarque with us. The Germans are fallen upon flax and hemp, the French on vineyards. Here grow wilde

an incredible number of vines, that tho' savage and so not so excellent, beside that much wood and shade sower them, they yield a pleasant grape, and I have drunk a good clarett, though small and greenish, of Capt. Rappe's vintage of the savage grape. The only interruption I meet with is from the unkindness of my neighbour proprietor, the Lord Baltimore, who not only refuseth compliance to the king's commands, and the grant he and the duke have graciously made me, but as impatient of the decision of our joynt sovereign, would anticipate that, by indirect waies of his own, who to say true, by the course of his affaires, yields him as little regard as ever he can; he taketh himself to be a prince, that, even to his fellow subject and brother proprietor, can of right determine differences by force, and we have been threatned with troops of horse (which are fine things to the wood) to reduce those parts in my possession to his power and greatness, aye though king and duke had them quietly before, and so were pleased to deliver them to me. And till I had preached another doctrine to him, as that the king was lord chief justice and high sheriff of America, that he finally must judge, eject, and give possession, he refused to go with me to king and counsell: saying he had nothing to do with king and counsell, but would take his right where he could get it. He also told me, my patent had a proviso and exception of appeals, but his had not. I told him, that omission was not a priviledge but a prejudice in my opinion; however, sovereignty was reserved I was sure, and, if the king was not appealable from Maryland, he was not sovereign of

Maryland, but the lord Baltimore. This softend [him?] a little to his duty, and now he pretends to referr, as do I, with an intire submission. My case I send as an answer to his demand; to which I only pray leave to add, that he never was in possession, and he consequently looseth nothing by the want of it, that he ever had. Further, he never claim'd it, not of the Dutch for 26 years after his graunt, nor of the Swedes for seven and forty years, the one having the upper part of the river, the other, to wit the Dutch, the lower and all the bay: which in an improved county is a forfeiture by omission and neglect; more it must be in a wild place, where the land is not the sixtieth part to the labour. To this I add, he never run his line, nor fixt his bounds; and with submission, where there are no boundaries, possessors, nor claymant, but long unquestion'd possession on another side, there can be no title pleadable against the planter; the maxim of the civil law holding good in this case,—*Quae nullius sunt in bonis dantur occupanti*. But this is not all; he needs it not; I do; without it I have nothing, and without it, he hath fourty brave harbours, having 200 miles for 2 degrees of the bravest bay in the world, Cheasapeak, and that, on both sides, replenisht with many stately rivers and coves for the biggest ships. I have two that ships of two hundred tons perhaps may enter out of the river; in the bay, none but for small craft; and where right is, to be sure prudence and proportion will more than even the scale. I must (without vanity I can) say, I have lead the greatest colony into America that ever any man did upon a private credit, and the

most prosperous beginnings that ever were in it, are to be found among us; and, if this lord (who may remember that his country was cutt out of Virginia, to the great abatement of the interest of that province, and this not for debt or salaries due, but as meer grace) shall carry away this poor ewe lamb too, my voyage will be a ruinous one to me and my partners, which God defend. And, my honourable friend, I shall only pray that my case may be remember'd and recommended to the king by my noble friend, the marquis of Hallifax. I am not to be blamed for this liberty, when it shall be consider'd how great a place his witt, honour, and abilities have with the king, and how much, and with what success, he hath acted the friend to my poor concerns. I hope the innocency of our friends at this juncture hath not dishonoured the lord of Hallifax former favours to them; as I take confidence to believe, that the innocency of men shall protect them in England with their superiours in evill times, else the odds would be little in being such. I say no more, but pray God to reward all thy favours to them and me, and to give me leave to value myself upon the character of

My Noble Friend.

Thy very affect. cordial
friend to serve thee,

PHILADELPHIA, *the 9th of the 12th month, 1683.*

TO THE MARQUIS OF HALLIFAX.